DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS/Space-Based Laser

SUBJECT: **Department of Defense Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 1996 . . . S. 1087. Stevens motion to table the Harkin amendment No. 2401.**

ACTION: MOTION TO TABLE AGREED TO, 57-41

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. 1087, the Department of Defense Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 1996, will appropriate $242.7 billion for the military functions of the Department of Defense for fiscal year 1996, which is $6.4 billion more than requested and $2.3 billion less than the fiscal year (FY) 1995 funding level.

The Harkin amendment would strike $70 million appropriated for Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation, Defense-Wide, with the intention of striking funding for the Space-Based Laser Program.

Debate was limited by unanimous consent. Following debate, Senator Stevens moved to table the Harkin amendment. Generally, those favoring the motion to table opposed the amendment; those opposing the motion to table favored the amendment.

Those favoring the motion to table contended:

The space-based laser program is a research program. No one is discussing yet the advisability, much less the probability, of deploying space-based lasers. It is a highly leveraged, highly technical program which the General Accounting Office says has met every single milestone that has ever been set for it. Frequently, it has accomplished what its critics have said is impossible. Given the opportunity, we do not see any reason to believe that it will not continue to operate just as admirably in the future. The whole point of the program is to keep the United States ahead of the rest of the world in technological developments that may have military uses. We do not know what type of threats we will face in the future and therefore what types of technology will be necessary to counter them. It is better for the United States to have technological capabilities that it does not need than for it to fail to prepare and face technological threats that it cannot adequately defend against. Therefore, Congress has the responsibility to make sure that the United States retains its technological edge.

(See other side)

YEAS (57)

Republicans (51 or 96%)		Democrats (6 or 13%)
Abraham	Hutchison	Biden
Ashcroft	Inhofe	Ford
Bennett	Jeffords	Heflin
Bond	Kassebaum	Hollings
Brown	Kempthorne	Inouye
Burns	Kyl	Lieberman
Campbell	Lott	
Coats	Lugar	
Cochran	McCain	
Cohen	McConnell	
Coverdell	Murkowski	
Craig	Nickles	
D'Amato	Packwood	
DeWine	Pressler	
Dole	Roth	
Domenici	Santorum	
Faircloth	Shelby	
Frist	Simpson	
Gorton	Smith	
Gramm	Snowe	
Grams	Specter	
Grassley	Stevens	
Gregg	Thomas	
Hatch	Thompson	
Helms	Thurmond	
	Warner	

NAYS (41)

Republicans (2 or 4%)	Democrats (39 or 87%)	
Chafee	Akaka	Kennedy
Hatfield	Baucus	Kerrey
	Bingaman	Kerry
	Boxer	Kohl
	Breaux	Lautenberg
	Bryan	Leahy
	Bumpers	Levin
	Byrd	Mikulski
	Conrad	Moseley-Braun
	Daschle	Moynihan
	Dodd	Murray
	Dorgan	Nunn
	Exon	Pell
	Feingold	Pryor
	Feinstein	Reid
	Glenn	Robb
	Graham	Rockefeller
	Harkin	Sarbanes
	Johnston	Simon
		Wellstone

NOT VOTING (2)

Republicans (1)	Democrats (1)
Mack-[2]	Bradley-[4]

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:
1—Official Buisiness
2—Necessarily Absent
3—Illness
4—Other

SYMBOLS:
AY—Announced Yea
AN—Announced Nay
PY—Paired Yea
PN—Paired Nay

Senators have raised 5 specific objections to this program. First, they have said that it would cost $30 billion to $48 billion to deploy. Perhaps, but nobody is planning on deployment, so this argument is irrelevant. Second, they have said that it would not be cost-effective to have a space-based laser system; however, it is too premature to make that evaluation. For instance, they have not considered that this system is the only system under consideration that would intercept a missile in its boost phase while it is still over enemy territory. This fact is a strong argument in favor of effectiveness. Third, they have said that it constitutes an ABM Treaty violation. However, this appropriation is for research only, and research is treaty-compliant. Fourth, they have said that it may not work. Maybe not--research is to find out what works and what does not. Based on experience, though, we expect that the researchers will meet every milestone we set for them. Fifth, our colleagues have suggested that Russians and others may develop effective countermeasures. Of course they may; technological advances are consistently made. Our job is to make sure we then overcome their countermeasures. We will not retain a technological lead if we refuse to do research.

A final point that should be made is that this type of successful military research program frequently has civilian spin-off benefits. In fact, the laser was developed 30 years ago as part of a military program. Since then, the laser has been invaluable in many civilian fields, including medicine and mathematics. Our colleagues should not be fearful of advancing the frontiers of knowledge. By pushing constantly to improve our defenses, we will remain secure. Refusing to improve will lead to stagnation and weakness. We oppose that result, and thus oppose this amendment.

Those opposing the motion to table contended:

Like Freddie Krueger, Star Wars is back. Included in the extra little spending line items that this bill adds to the Pentagon's request for funding is $70 million for a space-based laser. A recent development in this research program has made it almost a foregone conclusion that there will be an effort made in the next few years to deploy a space-based, strategic missile defense system that will use giant reflective mirrors to concentrate the beams from 12 laser battlestations. Each station will have enough energy to fire on up to 100 strategic missiles or up to 15 to 20 battlefield missiles. Chemical fluorine-hydrogen lasers will be used to produce 2.2 million watts of energy. They will be based in space because they can only penetrate the Earth's atmosphere by 5 or 6 miles. The big breakthrough is in the mirror design. Previous mirror designs would have relied on water cooling to prevent the lasers from shattering them. The enormous weight of these water-cooled mirrors was the main technical barrier to deployment. The new design uses a new mirror coating that is so reflective that no cooling will be needed. We think this fact will make it hard to stop efforts to develop and deploy this system, instead of just conducting research.

We have a number of problems with deploying a Star Wars missile defense system. Our first objection is to the cost. Estimates currently range between $30 billion and $48 billion. We cannot afford to spend that much. Our second objection is that space-based lasers are not cost-effective because they address a marginal threat. The Soviet Union no longer exists, and no other country presents a large missile threat to the United States. Those countries that do pose a threat are more likely to try to smuggle one or two bombs into the United States or to use cruise missiles than they are to use ballistic missiles. Third, it would clearly render the ABM Treaty null and void, and would consequently hurt American efforts to get the Russians to cut their nuclear arsenal. Fourth, this system, even with improved mirrors, may never work. We concede that the Pentagon has been able to prove that missile targets can be acquired and tracked from space, and that a small laser can be fired accurately, but we do not know if a large, incredibly more complex system can also work. For instance, after only a few seconds of firing of a chemical laser, the entire battlestation would be so violently shaken that it would no longer be properly aligned for firing. Also, to acquire and track hundreds of targets million of lines of computer code would have to be written. One little syntax error could crash the entire system. Fifth, and finally, we do not think it would take long for our enemies to figure out the way to defeat this system would be to coat their missiles with this new reflective coating. Laser beams would then bounce harmlessly off their missiles.

We have argued against Star Wars for the past decade. So far we have been successful in stopping a system from being built. We know that we are only talking about $70 million in this bill, but we fear that this $70 million is going to mushroom into billions of dollars in wasteful spending in the future. We urge our colleagues to nip this program in the bud by joining us in opposing the motion to table the Harkin amendment.